

RESPONDING TO THE SKEPTIC'S ATTACK AGAINST NAZARETH

Kyle Butt, M.A.

The town of Nazareth is “located in the southern end of the hills of Lower Galilee at about 1200 feet above sea level” (McRay, 1991, p. 157). Nazareth is about four miles southwest of Sepphoris. During the time of Christ, Sepphoris was the capital of Galilee, a major center of political and economical activity, and home of Herod Antipas (DeVries, 1997, p. 318). Primary research was done on the city in the mid-1950s by Bellarmino Bagatti. He discovered that the village during the time of

Jesus was “an agricultural settlement with numerous winepresses, olive presses, caves for storing grain, and cisterns for water and wine” (1969, p. 25). McRay noted that pottery found in Nazareth dates “from Iron Age II (900-600 B.C.) to the Byzantine period (330-640), including Roman pieces from the time of Christ” (p. 158). Bagatti stated:

The entire village of Nazareth has very many subterranean cavities, some used as stores, some used as tombs. The earliest documentation is indicated both by their form and the ceramics found therein. The latter put us in the presence of tombs already existing in the Middle Bronze Period, and silos already in use in the Iron Period (1969, p. 25).

During Bagatti’s digging in the 1950’s, he excavated an area underneath the modern Church of the Annunciation in an attempt to find any previously existing structures that dated before the 4th century A.D. Not only did he say, “The excavations in Nazareth have revealed grottos and basins of pre-Constantinian times which served for baptism” (1971, p. 243), he also noted:

From the excavations it emerged that the Byzantine church was not the first to be erected on the site, but it had been preceded by a religious site, of which notable remains still exist within the refill of over two metres height over

the native rock.... We can, therefore, hold that the first edifice, raised on the traditional site of the Annunciation, was erected in about the 3rd century in the synagogal form of the edifices mentioned (1971, p. 125).

RENÉ SALM’S ATTACK OF NAZARETH

In 2008, the American Atheist Press published a book by René Salm titled, *The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus*. The thesis of the book simply is that Nazareth was uninhabited at the time of Christ, thus the Bible writers could not have been



The Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth

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correct in their statements concerning Christ's life there. The publishers are so positive that Salm has effectively proved his thesis, that the back of the book cover includes tremendously brazen statements by those who have read the book. The cover quotes Frank Zindler who says: "Christianity cannot survive unless this book can be refuted," and "By proving scientifically that Nazareth was uninhabited at the time Jesus of Nazareth and his family were supposed to be living there, Salm strikes the Achilles' heel of a very popular god." Robert Price's comment on the back cover states: "I am amazed by your work and can't wait to see the pathetic attempts to reply." According to his "fans," Salm's book **must be** answered in order for

Christianity to remain a reasonable, historic religion.

The fact of the matter is, the skeptical community often writes and publishes material that makes such brash claims about its potency. One reason for such hubris is that outlandish claims of this nature excite the curiosity of those in both the Christian and skeptical community. Such bold assertions often draw the attention of those who are weaker in the faith and who do not understand that this tactic is used regularly by the skeptics. In truth, Salm's book can be refuted. But more importantly, if no one in the Christian community chose to turn a page of the book or write a sentence in response, Christianity as a whole would certainly continue to survive.

Salm's Case Against Nazareth Habitation During the Time of Christ

Salm focuses his attention on the town of Nazareth because he says:

Unlike aspects of the gospel story that are quite beyond verification—the miracles of Jesus, his bodily resurrection, his virgin birth, or even his human nature—the existence of Nazareth two thousand years ago can be proved or disproved by digging in the ground. Because the archaeology

of a site is empirically demonstrable, "Nazareth" is in a category apart. To this day, it preserves the explosive potential to either prove or disprove the gospel accounts. Upon that determination depends a great deal, perhaps even the entire edifice of Christendom (2008, p. xii).

Salm claims that work done by Bagatti and other researchers like Père Viaud are "unabashedly apologetic" in their attempts to prove that Nazareth was inhabited during the time of Christ. He also says that most people who study Nazareth go to Bible dictionary and encyclopedia articles about the site, and not to the direct sources. He claims that this reliance on "secondary literature" causes the average person to be "two steps removed from a correct appreciation of the site" (p. xiv). Salm then claims that his book "brings together all the primary reports for the first time, and allows an independent and objective opinion to be formed regarding the site's history" (p. xv).

The irony of Salm's statement is two fold. First, it is apparent from Salm's title that his book is "unabashedly apologetic" in his attempt to disprove Nazareth habitation at the time of Christ. One could not read ten pages of his book without feeling the force of his blatantly one-sided attack against the biblical idea. Second, Salm's book is "secondary literature." He has not done primary excavations at the site himself, and while that fact does not disqualify him from writing on the subject, his accusation that secondary literature clouds the "correct appreciation" undermines his own work. In a very real sense, Salm is a biased author of secondary literature about Nazareth.

In his book, Salm acknowledges the numerous pieces of pottery and other excavated evidence that date the city of Nazareth as early as the Middle Bronze Age. He noted: "The Bronze Age finds at Nazareth come from five tombs and date to the Middle and late Bronze Ages (2200-1200 BCE)"

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(p. 36). He stated: “The fact that five tombs in the Nazareth basin already exist by the end of the Intermediate Period shows that this quiet and fertile location enticed a substantial group of people to cease their wanderings and settle down” (p. 40). In addition, Salm recognizes that artifacts from the site date to an extended period during the Iron Age, which he classifies as about 1100-700 B.C. He stated: “Combining historical data, the evidence from the ground, together with that from surveys of Southern Galilee, it is probable that a new group of people entered the Nazareth basin about 1100 BCE, and that they continued to live there for about four centuries” (p. 53). These statements are based primarily on the Bronze Period pottery Bagatti describes in *Excavations of Nazareth* (pp. 258-268) and pieces from the Iron Period (pp. 269-272).

It is at this point in his writing that Salm interjects his thesis. He claims that habitation in Nazareth ended within “a generation or two of the Assyrian conquest” and did not resume until the middle of the 1st century (50-100 BCE) (p. 53). “Thus,” writes Salm,

732 is a *terminus a quo* for the beginning of a long hiatus in the Nazareth basin. I call it the Great Hiatus (or simply the hiatus), a multi-century gap in evidence of human habitation. The Babylonian and Persian periods are entirely unattested by evidence in the Nazareth basin (p. 60).

Salm bases his Great Hiatus hypothesis on **the claim** that no artifacts have been found that date between about 700 B.C. to about A.D. 50. He mentioned excavations done in the area of the Church of the Annunciation during the 1930s in which no evidence of a Greek or Roman settlement was found. Salm then wrote: “The following year, R. Tonneau wrote an article in which he registered an amazing fact: no evidence of either Greek or Roman settlement had been found in the excavations” (p. 65).

Notice, however, that Salm stresses the lack of material being found. Throughout the rest of his book, he equivocates the absence of evidence with the absence of a settlement. In essence, he says that since the excavations did not find a settlement, that proves that no settlement existed. Salm’s assertion violates one of the most fundamental rules of interpreting archaeological information. It is a well-known truth that “absence of evidence” does not provide “evidence of absence.” A host of reasons exist as to why the settlement may not have been discovered by the excavations. It could be that the small area excavated was a field or a yard in a settlement that did not have any artifacts to yield. Yet Salm insists that because no evidence of such a settlement was found at that time, then that proves there was not a settlement. He wrote: “The fact that habitations and other domestic evidence have never been uncovered on the hillside confirms the obvious. It is clear that the settlement in all ancient periods was situated on the valley floor” (p. 68). Actually, the only thing that the lack of evidence of a settlement proved at the time was that excavations had not yet uncovered one, not that one did not exist. All it would take to refute Salm on this important point is simply to find evidence of a settlement.

Salm’s Missing Settlement is Found

Salm’s faulty reasoning became apparent in late 2009 when evidence of a domestic habitation was unearthed in the area he claimed was never a first-century settlement. In December of 2009, Nazareth made worldwide headlines. Archaeologist Yardena Alexandre and her colleagues uncovered a small structure that they dated to the time of Christ (Hadid, 2009). The Israel Antiquities Authority official press release hailed this discovery as the first of its kind in which a residential structure was uncovered. The announcement noted the importance of the discovery, and quoted Yardena:

The discovery is of utmost importance since it reveals for the very first time a house from the Jewish village of Nazareth and thereby sheds light on the way of life at the time of Jesus. The building that we found is small and modest and it is most likely typical of the dwellings in Nazareth in that period. From the few written sources that there are, we know that in the first century CE Nazareth was a small Jewish village, located inside a valley. Until now a number of tombs from the time of Jesus were found in Nazareth; however, no settlement remains have been discovered that are attributed to this period (as quoted in “Residential Building...,” 2009).

Alexandre based her dating conclusions on the clay and chalk pottery shards that were found in the house. The pottery shards date from the Hellenic Roman period from 100 B.C. to A.D. 100. The researchers suggested that the existence of chalk indicated that Jews lived in the town, since such chalk “was used by the Jews at the time to ensure the purity of the food and water kept inside the vessels” (Hadid, 2009). The Israel Antiquities Authority confirmed this statement, and added that using such chalk vessels was unique and exclusive to the Jewish community (“Residential Building...,” 2009). Hadid also reported that Yardena and her fellow archaeologists believe that the lack of fancier, more expensive materials such as glass indicates that the residents of the small village were “simple,” maybe traders or farmers.

The house on which Alexandre and her team focused their research seems to have been about 900 square feet in area. Due to constraints at the sight, however, the team believes the house could be larger than the area that they have uncovered, but Yardena does not foresee the chance to excavate the area further. The remains of the house include “a wall, a hideout, a courtyard and a water system that appeared to collect water from the roof and supply it to the home” (Hadid, 2009). In addition, the team also found a hid-

den entryway into a small cave that Alexandre believes the Jews living in Nazareth used to hide from Roman soldiers.

The dating method used by Yardena and her team, of matching pottery from the site to other pottery in an attempt to properly identify the time frame of the dig, is one of the most frequently used dating methods in archaeology. McRay mentioned this dating method as one of the most effective:

The potters of antiquity were careful imitators but reluctant innovators.... At any rate style did seem to change from period to period, slowly but decisively, and we are now able to observe those changes in style and from them establish a chronology. The methodology is not exact, but within reasonable limitations it does provide a workable typology upon which to construct a fairly reliable chronology (1991, p. 32).

Since Salm's book was published in 2006, he could not have included the 2009 find in his writings. And while he may attempt to dismiss the new find, or re-work his information around it, the fact that only one year after his major publication a new archaeological find in the area overturns numerous assertions he made shows that his misguided reasoning is inherently flawed.

More "Absence of Evidence" Reasoning

In addition to his faulty reasoning from the absence of evidence regarding a first-century settlement in Nazareth, Salm applies the same type of reasoning to literature that does not mention Nazareth. He wrote: "Nazareth is not mentioned in Jewish scripture, nor in the writings of the first century Jewish general Josephus, nor in the Talmud of later times. How, then, was it possible for the town to exist and yet to evade mention for so many centuries?" (2008, p. 64). As we have seen, the fact that a city or settlement is not found, or is not mentioned, does nothing to provide positive evidence that it did not exist. In regard to Salm's

statement, one could easily respond that the New Testament documents do, in fact, mention the city and those documents happen to be among the best-attested and most historically accurate ancient literature available (see Butt, 2007). In addition, the New Testament testimony about the city reveals that it was most likely small and despised at the time. As Freund noted: "Although the city name of Nazareth might not have been known in antiquity, it is also possible that Nazareth is simply not mentioned in these other writings because it was a small, out of the way village" (Freund, 2009, p. 297).

Salm's "Lack" of Evidence Lacks Evidence

It has been shown that Salm's "lack of evidence" reasoning is inherently flawed. Furthermore, we have seen that a single new find can upset the most painstakingly devised assertions based on such thinking. Salm's thesis runs into additional problems when one takes a close look at the evidence that is actually available, and that he acknowledges as authentic.

Bow-Spouted Lamps

As mentioned earlier, one of the most accurate ways to date any ancient location is by the pottery and lamps that are found there. In an attempt to prove his claim that none of the pottery or lamps found in Nazareth shows that the town was inhabited during the time of Christ, Salm must deal with the numerous pieces of pottery that others have dated to that time. He stated: "Ultimately, an accurate history of Nazareth can be determined only on the basis of datable material

excavated on the site" (2008, p. 105). To describe evidence that he believed would meet that criterion, Bagatti wrote concerning the grotto he labeled #25: "Small pieces of 'Herodian' lamps found at the threshold and a little inside show clearly how this place was in use already in the first century" (1969, p. 46). Concerning the various "Herodian" lamps from this grotto and others around the site, Bagatti stated: "The 'Herodian' lamps give the known variants: without ornament, with circles near the wick-hole, the body with walls both roundish and angular" (1969, p. 309).

Concerning the lamps, Salm stated:

In 1961 P. Lapp wrote that undecorated bow-spouted lamps were current "75 B.C.—A.D. 70." In that same year, however, R. Smith tentatively dated the type from *c. 37 BCE* (the accession of Herod the Great). Smith even considered a later beginning for this lamp possible.... In 1980 J. Hayes wrote that such lamps were common in Jerusalem in early 1 CE. In 1982 Varda Sussman dated the appearance of this type in Judea to 'the reign of Herod.' A few years later, however, she was able to conclude: 'Recent archaeological evidence suggests that their first appearance was somewhat later, *after the reign of Herod* (emphasis added). We will adopt the latter view in these pages. Thus, we can now date the first appearance of the bow-spouted lamp in Jerusalem to *c. 1-25 CE*. Because a few years must be allowed for the spread of the type to rural villages of the north, *c. 15-c. 40 CE* is the earliest probable time for the appearance of this type in Southern Galilee. Accordingly, we shall adopt 25 CE as the *terminus post quem* for the bow-spouted oil lamp at Nazareth (2008, pp. 168-169, italics in orig, emp. added).

This lengthy quote shows the inherent bias and subtle ways that Salm chooses to evaluate the available evidence. Notice that many writers date the Herodian lamp to much earlier than A.D. 1-25, yet with a quick scratch of the pen, Salm simply states. "We will adopt the latter view in these pages."



A bow-spouted Herodian lamp

God Cannot be Tempted...But Jesus Was?

Eric Lyons, M.Min.

According to Scripture, Jesus was Deity in the flesh (John 1:1-5,14; 20:28). He was not sired by man; He was not conceived naturally by woman (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). Rather, Jesus came from heaven (John 3:13; 6:38), proved His “mighty God” Messiahship (Isaiah 9:6) through a variety of verified miracles (John 20:30-31; cf. Lyons and Butt, 2006), accepted worship (Matthew 14:33; John 9:38), and claimed a unity with God the Father that even His enemies understood was a profession of Deity (John 10:30,33). Some, however, question the Bible’s consistency of Jesus being God. The argument goes something like this (cf. Wells, 2010): The Bible declares that Satan tempted Jesus (Matthew 4:1), and that Jesus was “in all points tempted as we are” (Hebrews 4:15). Yet, the Bible also declares that “God cannot be tempted by evil” (James 1:13). Therefore, the Bible (allegedly) contradicts itself regarding the nature of Jesus. How could He be God, if God cannot be tempted?

First, Christians freely admit that contemplation of the nature of God is by no means a simple mental exercise. We were created; He has always been (Psalm 90:2). We have flesh and bones; God is Spirit (John 4:24). We are limited in power; He is omnipotent (Genesis 17:1). We can become knowledgeable about some things; God’s knowledge has always been infinite—“too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it” (Psalm 139:6). The apostle Paul expressed his amazement of God to the Christians in Rome, saying, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (11:33). It is always a humbling mental struggle for mere man to contemplate the wondrous attributes of God.

Still, however, the legitimate question remains: How could Jesus be God, if He was tempted while on Earth? The answer to this question is basically the same for a variety of questions that one may ask about the nature of Jesus. How could Jesus not

know something if He was God (e.g., the time of His Second Coming; Mark 13:32)? How could God the Father be greater than Jesus if Jesus was “equal with God” (John 14:28; John 5:18; Philippians 2:6)? The answer to these and similar questions must be understood in light of what the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi concerning Jesus’ self-limitation during His time on Earth. According to Paul, Christ

being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made **Himself of no reputation** [He “emptied Himself”—NASB], taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself** and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:6-8, emp. added).

While on Earth in the flesh, Jesus was **voluntarily** in a subordinate position to the Father. Christ “emptied Himself” (Philippians 2:7; He “made **Himself nothing**”—NIV). Unlike Adam and Eve, who made an attempt to seize equality with God (Genesis 3:5), Jesus, the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:47), humbled Himself, and obediently accepted the role of a servant. But, as Wayne Jackson observed, Jesus’ earthly limitations “were not the consequence of a less-than-God **nature**; rather, they were the result of a **self-imposed submission** reflecting the exercise of His sovereign will” (1995, emp. added). In the form of man, Jesus assumed a position of complete subjection to the Father, and exercised His divine attributes only at the Father’s bidding (cf. John 8:26,28-29) [Wycliffe, 1985]. As A.H. Strong similarly commented, Jesus “resigned not the possession, nor yet entirely the use, but rather the independent exercise, of the divine attributes” (1907, p. 703).

Admittedly, as with Deity’s very nature, understanding Jesus as being fully human in addition to His divine nature is not a simple concept to grasp. When Jesus came to Earth, He added humanity to His divinity—He was made “in the likeness of





men” (Philippians 2:7). He moved from the spiritual realm to put on flesh (John 1:14) and became subject to such things as hunger, thirst, weariness, and pain. Our holy God chose to come into this world as a helpless babe, Who, for the first time in His eternal existence, “increased in wisdom” as a child (Luke 2:52). In order to become the perfect sacrifice and Great High Priest, Jesus willingly submitted Himself to temptation and death. As the writer of Hebrews noted: “[I]n all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (2:17-18).

In short, the Bible’s depiction of Jesus as God incarnated is not contradictory. As the immortal, invisible, pre-incarnate Word (1 Timothy 1:17), He was God (John 1:1). When the Word put on flesh, He was still **by**

nature God (John 10:30,33; 20:28), though He willingly “humbled Himself” and “made Himself of no reputation” (2:6-8) in order to become the tempted, but perfect Man. Indeed, He “who knew no sin” became “sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

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QUESTION & ANSWER

Q How do you know the “days” of Genesis 1 were literal?

A There are several linguistic reasons that demonstrate that “day” in Genesis 1 refers to an ordinary day (Lyons, 2001). There are also scientific reasons to draw the same conclusion. One indication is the presence of symbiosis in the created order. Symbiosis is defined as “the relation between two different species of organisms that are interdependent; each gains benefits from the other” (“Symbiosis,” n.d.). Mutualism is a form of symbiosis in which both species benefit. Many mutualistic relationships are obligative, that is, neither species can live without the other. For example, the Yucca plant and Yucca moth are completely dependent on each other for survival. The Yucca plant is unable to pollinate itself to grow more seeds and reproduce. It depends specifically on the Yucca moth for pollination. The moth depends specifically on the Yucca plant to provide the means to hatch new moths. The two were clearly **designed to function together**. But according to the Genesis account, plants were made on Day 3

while insects were created on Days 5-6. So the moth and the plant had to come into existence in close temporal proximity. They could not have been separated by millions of years. Nor could they have “co-evolved”—a meaningless, nonsensical notion that fails to account for the inherent and irreducible necessity of mutualism from the beginning of each organism’s existence.

Dave Miller

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Yet the “latter view” happens to be the crux of the issue. Could it be that the latter view is not right—that the lamp dates to as early as 75 or 37 B.C.? Yes. Salm gives no verified reason why the reader must “adopt the latter view.” In fact, Salm’s primary reason to adopt that view is because he has to have it in order to construct his case that Nazareth was not inhabited from 75 B.C.

Furthermore, after arbitrarily adopting the “latter view,” he again gives a date of A.D. 1-25 for the lamp’s appearance in Jerusalem. Yet the “latter view” (that he arbitrarily adopted) only mentioned that the appearance was “somewhat after” Herod’s reign. Salm picks the dates of A.D. 1-25, when it just as easily could have been 4 B.C.-A.D. 4. Then he again arbitrarily pulls out of the air the idea that A.D. 25 is the earliest the lamp could have arrived at Nazareth. Salm notes that the lamp continued in use until about A.D. 135 and stated: “The

time span, then, for the bow-spouted lamp in Lower Galilee is slightly over a century: c. 25 CE to c. 135 CE” (p. 169). Salm then writes: “In conclusion, the data clearly show that settlers did not come into the basin before c. 25 CE” (p. 172). Let us notice, however, that Salm’s conclusion is not “what the data clearly show,” but only what Salm arbitrarily adopts as his earliest estimates. Using other estimates that he mentioned from other writers as possible dates of the lamps, one could just as easily say that the data “clearly show” that the settlers could have come in the basin in 60, 37, or 4 B.C.

Furthermore, there is an extremely important point to be made about Salm’s biased dating of the lamps. Even if we allow him to use all the latest possible dates, adding to them arbitrarily designated times spans of how long it would have taken the lamp to get to Nazareth, his own statements show that Nazareth could easily have been inhabited during the time of Christ. Salm wrote:

The incipience of a village is not equivalent to the arrival of the first settlers at the site. No village springs up overnight. It requires a certain amount of time—perhaps a generation or two—to come into existence.... The presence of tombs [in Nazareth] indicates both permanence and population, and it is strongly suggestive of a “village.” Thus, *the earliest tomb* at Nazareth is a significant clue regarding

the existence of a village. Determining its date will be an important goal of these pages. The period of tomb use can be revealed by dating funerary artefacts found *in situ* (pp. 156-157, *italics in orig.*).

In this regard, Salm further noted that several of the bow-spouted lamps were found in tombs. Thus, according to Salm’s reasoning, tombs show the presence of a village, and settlers in the area could/would have been in the area possibly two generations before that village came into existence. Using Salm’s personally concocted date of A.D. 25 for the earliest date of the lamps, that means that the earliest tomb could possibly date to A.D. 25. And, if settlers were in the area two generations before that (using 40 years as a generation), that would put people in the area in about 55 B.C. Taking that into account, there is absolutely no way that Salm can prove that Nazareth was not inhabited during the time of Christ. The most he can do is suggest that, if his arbitrarily chosen dates are adopted, it seems improbable. Yet even this “improbability” does not accord well with the ranges of dates that are often adopted for such artifacts as the “Herodian” lamps.

Kokh Tombs

One of the most prevalent archaeological features of the area of Nazareth is the abundance of tombs. Salm and others recognize approximately 20 tombs in Nazareth as “kokh-type” tombs. Salm admits that kokh tomb use began in Jerusalem about 150 B.C. But he does not believe that such an early date can be attributed to the tombs in Galilee and Nazareth. Thus, he states: “As regards to Nazareth, the failure to completely appreciate a lag time between the appearance of kokh tombs and bow-spouted oil lamps in Jerusalem and their appearance in Galilee has generally resulted in an early chronology for the site” (p. 158). Salm asserts

that kokh tomb use begins c. 150 BCE in Jerusalem, comes to prevail in that city after Herod’s accession, and

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Kyle Butt

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spreads to Galilee only after c. 50 CE. Thus M. Aviam has noted that “no Jewish tombs from the Hasmonaean or Early Roman periods have yet been excavated in the Galilee.” In all, there is a 200-year delay between the first beginnings of kokh use in Jerusalem and its appearance in Galilee (p. 159).

Again, notice Salm’s “absence of evidence” argumentation when he claims that since M. Aviam states that no kokh tomb from Hasmonaean or Early Roman times has been found or excavated, **that must mean that none exists**. Such is simply not the case. Furthermore, if one were to date the bow-spouted lamps back to 75 or 37 B.C., that would put the tombs at Nazareth in the early Roman period, as Chancey and Porter stated: “One of the more commonly discovered lamps for the early part of the Roman period is the so-called ‘Herodian Lamp,’ which appears at sites all over Palestine. The wide distribution of these lamps is probably a result of their relatively easy manufacturing process” (2001, p. 184).

Salm then reasons that the earliest kokh tomb in Nazareth could date to A.D. 50. Yet, again, his number is nothing but arbitrary determination. Are we supposed to believe that it was impossible for the tomb design to reach Nazareth in less than 200 years? Could it have been 50 years earlier that the tomb design reached Nazareth? There is no evidentiary reason to conclude that such is not a possibility. In addition, using Salm’s own admission that such tombs show that settlers had been in the area for possibly two generations, using 40 years for a generation would still put people in the area by 30 B.C., well before the early childhood of Jesus. Once again, even if Salm is correct about his date (which is most likely not the case), his reasoning could only be used to suggest that there “might not” have been a village in the time of Christ, based only on the scant excavations done up to 2006. But he has taken it upon himself to prove that



A typical Kokh tomb in the first century A.D.

Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com

there could not have been, which he very well has not, and cannot, do.

CONCLUSION

The excavations of Nazareth have stirred intense debate among scholars in recent years. In an effort to disprove biblical inerrancy, the skeptical community, led by René Salm, has attempted to prove that Nazareth was not inhabited during the time of Christ. Much of the argumentation used to come to this conclusion is based on a lack of evidence, and such reasoning has been repeatedly shown to be flawed. Furthermore, the recent find of a structure that corresponds with a domestic habitation in the area, with datable pottery, overturns a host of the skeptical community’s false assertions concerning Nazareth.

In addition, the dates for bow-spouted lamps and kokh tombs admit, at the very least, the possibility of a settlement in the area, even using Salm’s dating and reasoning. And to the unbiased observer, exhibit obvious signs of habitation during the time that Christ was said to be living in the area. Salm’s arbitrary dates, however, show an evident bias and subjective stance, and far earlier dates could most rationally be assigned to both of these archaeological artifacts. In summary, a reasonable investigator must recognize that Nazareth was inhabited as early as 2000 B.C., and its habitation by Jews between 100

B.C.—100 A.D. fits well with all the information currently extant from the site.

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Where Was Jesus called a Nazarene?

Eric Lyons, M.Min.

In addition to the unfounded criticism surrounding Nazareth's existence early in the first century, skeptics are also fond of denying the fulfilled prophecy of Jesus being called a Nazarene. At the close of Matthew chapter two, the inspired tax collector recorded that Jesus' family "came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, **that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'**" (2:23, emp. added). The fact of the matter is, however, the words "He shall be called a Nazarene" are nowhere found in the Old Testament, nor is Jesus ever called "a Nazarene" in the New Testament apart from Matthew 2:23. For these reasons, Bible critics often include Matthew 2:23 in lists of Bible "contradictions" or "inconsistencies" that supposedly disprove the inspiration of the Bible (cf. McKinsey, 1995, pp. 167,293; Morgan, 2010).

So what are Christians to do with Matthew 2:23? Do we concede it as a contradiction, or is there a reasonable response? How could Matthew truthfully write that Jesus' family moved to Nazareth "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'?"

First, Bible students must keep in mind that quotation marks were foreign to the Bible writers, as well as all authors of antiquity. As Wayne Jackson noted: "[A]ncient writers did not use the same literary devices employed today. Quotation marks, colons, ellipsis marks, brackets, etc., were unknown to them. In view of this, we may not always know just how they were utilizing the language of the former Scriptures" (1988). Could it be that Matthew did not intend for His readers to understand this statement as a direct quotation from the Old Testament, but rather a more generalized truth?

What underlying truth could Matthew possibly have been trying to convey by the statement, "He shall be called a Nazarene"? Before answering this question, consider how the names

of cities have occasionally been used to represent a particular idea. From a negative standpoint, a homosexual may be referred to as a **sodomite** (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10, NKJV, RSV). In the first century, the inhabitants of Corinth were so sexually immoral that the verb *korinthiazo* ("to **Corinthianize**" or "act like Corinthians") meant to commit sexual immorality (Foster, 1974, pp. 6-7). In regards to Nazareth, the city had a reputation of being rather insignificant. It was in a partially Gentile-settled region (Galilee) that the Pharisees looked down upon, as is evident by their erroneous assertion that "no prophet has arisen out of Galilee" (John 7:52). [NOTE: Jonah was from Gath Hepher in the southern part of Galilee (2 Kings 14:25).] What's more, recall that when Philip informed Nathanael that he had found the Messiah, "Jesus of Nazareth" (John 1:45), Nathanael responded: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (vs. 46). "To come from Nazareth, therefore, or to be a Nazarene, was the same as to be despised, or to be esteemed of low birth" (Barnes, 1997). The fact is, the Old Testament prophets foretold that the Messiah would be a "despised...root out of dry ground" with "no form or comeliness" (Isaiah 53:2-3; cf. Psalm 22:6-7). Similar to how cities such as Sodom and Corinth have been used to describe a particular activity (albeit wicked), Matthew likely assigned the term Nazarene to Jesus to adequately express the prophets' predictions of His lowly, despised origins (cf. Acts 24:5).

Still, some might wonder why Jesus was never actually "called" a Nazarene anywhere in the New Testament (outside of Matthew 2:23). The answer is quite simple (though perhaps foreign to many in the 21st century): in Scripture, to "be called" often meant the same as "shall be" (see Lyons, 2010). When God said that Eve would "be called woman," He did not mean that "woman" would be her name, but that **by nature** she was a woman (Genesis 2:23; 3:20). When Matthew quoted

the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 and testified that the people "shall call His name Immanuel" (Matthew 1:23), he meant that **by nature** the son of Mary was Immanuel, meaning "God with us" (whereas the literal **name** He wore was "Jesus"—1:1:25; Luke 1:30-35; cf. Isaiah 9:6). Likewise, when Matthew used the word "Nazarene" one chapter later, he was most likely describing the lowliness of Jesus' life (i.e., He "made Himself of no reputation"—Philippians 2:7).

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

APOLOGETICS
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WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT...

The central purpose of Apologetics Press, from its inception over 30 years ago, has been to produce materials that defend the Christian Faith. More specifically, A.P. has specialized in providing assistance in combating atheism, evolution, and skepticism. The staff has spent countless hours researching and refuting those who attack the existence of God, the inspiration of the Bible, the Genesis account of Creation, and the truthfulness of Christianity. Three decades later, that focus remains unchanged.

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Dave Miller